
INTERVIEW WITH MARY ETTA McMANUS,

CLASS OF 1948

Sandi Cupples

Okay, welcome to Illinois State University. This is Sandi Cupples and I am a member of the Student Alumni Council. I am talking with Mary Etta Edwards McManus of the Class of 1948 at ISU at homecoming activities on October 29, 1983. During this bit of oral history we will be reminiscing about the way it was in 1948. We hope that those who listen to this tape will enjoy hearing from the persons who have volunteered to record this big of ISU history and will find it interesting and informative. First, Mrs. Edwards, as you think back thirty-five years, what are some of the things that are foremost in your memory of what life was like then at Illinois State University?

Mary Etta McManus

Okay, I'm Mrs. McManus. Edwards was my maiden name. The most interesting thing I think and the most prominent thing was that when we started we were in a war and when we finished we were in peacetime. And of course during the wartime there were very few men around and very... we had to tighten up on everything, people didn't have very much money and also there were—there was rationing on a number of things. We didn't have cars, of course, partly because we didn't have the money and partly because it was war time. But the attitude was different in that everybody was working as hard as they could at whatever they could do. There wasn't time for any self-evaluation or self-examination at that time. Everybody was just... said, "Well, I'll do everything that I can." We were students and so we studied hard. Everybody took at least sixteen or seventeen hours every semester and—or more—and worked too, had jobs. We worked. Of course, the campus was a lot smaller and it was a tight-knit group. We had the common interest of a war and being small university. Do you want me to go on?

Sandi Cupples

What do you remember about President Fairchild?

Mary Etta McManus

He was a very dignified person, spoke very well and was friendly to the students but in those days professors kept more of a distance and I suppose he had students in his home but they'd be on very formal occasions I should imagine. Someone called the radio station the other day and said they thought that President Fairchild would handle the student situation out here today, like parties and so forth, much better than they're handling it now. But it's pretty hard to tell because it was such a different day and age. He handled the situation very well then, but the school didn't allow any liquor, people weren't allowed to smoke on the campus, and it was a tenth of the size that it is now. He was a very fine, fine person, a very fine president, but he wasn't asked to be that—mix with people on a social level nearly as much as it is today.

Sandi Cupples

So do you think that he had the problems that the students are having now?

Mary Etta McManus

Oh no, not at all. We had the problem of having to live in a war time and having to live on tight times. We... the cars on the campus were very few and far between and they usually belonged to community students. So there wasn't a problem with cars and that—pollution, people didn't even have bicycles so we didn't have... everybody walked. But then the campus was so much smaller and people were so much closer to what they really didn't need. They didn't have any money to spend so they couldn't go much of anyplace. But we didn't mind that much, everybody was in the same boat and our thoughts were on the war and people getting home from that.

Sandi Cupples

Okay. Who were some of the professors and university administrative officials that you remember for special reasons?

Mary Etta McManus

Well, I worked for Fern Roseman, she was—she ran the Post Office and it was located in Old Main, right inside of Old Main. And that was a very enjoyable job. She was an extremely nice person and then we were in the center of the—of Old Main, and just about everybody came by the door eventually, I liked it very much because I got to know everybody. The professors came there and some... Preston Ensign was the Business Administrator and he and Dr. Fairchild were just across—President Fairchild—were just across the hall from the Post Office. And I was an English major and Speech minor, so those professors I remember very well. Dr. Florence Teager was an outstanding professor, very academic, very high-level person, very fair, but she expected a lot from us and she gave us a lot too. Then everybody worked, and I worked in the Post Office, I also worked for Dr. Laura Pricer, she was, she taught grammar mostly, she was from the south originally, of course she lived in Normal for years and years but she never lost her southern accent. And then I also worked for Miss Stroud who was, who taught in the—mostly in the Metcalf— well, U High, it's U High now. That was located on campus, in the building just east of Old Main, it was— that was the high school and grade school, I think. The upstairs was a high school. And Miss Stroud was an exceptionally fine literature teacher too. Dr. F. L. D. Holmes, used to call him "Alphabet Holmes," he was head of the Speech Department. Oh, these people really had a very high level of performance for themselves and they expected quite a bit from us. It was... because there wasn't much else to do, I guess the academics was much higher. Dr.—Dean [Shrayer?], he was the dean when I first came here and he retired while I was here, then came back after the war was over and all the returning servicemen came in and they needed more professors, he came back and taught philosophy. I had philosophy with him and he was really some, like a professor to sit in on, very fun. And, let's see, Dr. Hiatt was head of the English Department here at that time. Dr. [Better?], I finally had him in graduate school then years later and was delightful to find him the same person, integrity, and high... high standards and intense interest in the students and his subject.

Sandi Cupples

Were there—are there still any professors here that you had?

Mary Etta McManus

I don't think so, but some of them have just gone out not too long ago. But most of the ones that I had left quite a while ago. In the Speech Department, Mabel Clare Allen was the Allen Theatre, the experimental theater over in the, in Westhoff... was it Westhoff Theatre—?

Sandi Cupples

Mmh-hmm.

Mary Etta McManus

—Building? It was named for her. She was the total Drama Department and she's been gone for a while. Ruth Yates was head of Interpretative... well, of course they all, they taught too, they had subjects to teach. Eric Bigley, I think he retired not so very long ago. He was, he just came in shortly after I left, so it's been quite a while. Most all of them have left.

Sandi Cupples

Okay. Students today talk about how difficult it is to complete their education. How do you compare how it was during your years here to the way it seems to be today?

Mary Etta McManus

It was harder economically in one sense of the word. We had, we just had to go without. But, for instance, clothes were a minimum, people didn't dress such as well. Of course they—people dress the way they want to now, I think there was a little more of a code then, like you didn't wear jeans to a... to a, sort of, social event, but people just had to, there wasn't any high class dressing, and that was easy, but I think it was the unified attitude, objective attitude that we had. Which was good in a way for us, our goal was set, we knew where we were going, there wasn't any question, we didn't have any choice. But there wasn't much self-examination. For instance, now people examine, you know, the quality of the university, the quality of the social life, such as racial issues, and those things weren't examined then because we had to stay unified, you know, to—against an outer enemy. And I think if we didn't do the self-examination, you know, we wouldn't get anywhere. I remember when I worked in the Post Office, there was one of the carriers from downtown, he used to come in every day and we got to know him, you know, and of course kidded back and forth, and some different comments I made, he used to call me a "nigger lover." And that would be, you know, kind of, probably wouldn't happen today. Because it was something, people just had their attitudes but they buried them and now they're pulled out and examined and I think it's—the good comes of it, I think it's a good thing.

Sandi Cupples

What kinds of extracurricular activities were important to you and other students?

Mary Etta McManus

Well, for me, speech and drama were—I spent a lot of my time in that, competing in contests and being in plays and I enjoyed that and met a lot of people that I liked very much. I later taught English and Speech and directed plays and so it was a big, important part of my life. The honorary fraternities, that's what they were called, went along with each subject, they still have those, and they were the most important part, I think, of the campus life, because had what little parties we had and made the social end of it, where you can meet people interested in the things you were interested in and—

Sandi Cupples

So were a lot of the students involved in a fraternity or sorority?

Mary Etta McManus

Again—

Sandi Cupples

The majority of them?

Mary Etta McManus

Just, well, fratern— they didn't call them sororities, they were just, because they were "honorary," they were academic—

Sandi Cupples

I see.

Mary Etta McManus

—and you got into them because you had certain points, you were in certain number of plays, or you achieved certain grades. So you had to have—there were two organizations, Wrightonia and Philadelphia. They were called literary societies, and when you signed up on the university you were automatically put in one or the other. By the time I was here they were beginning to wane and by the end of the war after the servicemen came back they just weren't interested in that sort of thing. Things changed a great deal after they came back because they weren't going to... Before the war, they actually threw people out of the university because they drank or had liquor and after the war, when these men who had been in combat came back, they just, it was ridiculous, you know, to impose these things on them, so it didn't... so Philadelphia and Wrightonia kind of went out the window. They were from an older day. But, let's see, the other organizations, well, there was a Blackfriars, a men's organization, I guess that would have been about the closest to a fraternity that there was, and they used to put on a hilarious slapstick show every year that everybody enjoyed. Just complete nonsense and a little on the bawdy side, and everybody enjoyed... They were the fun time boys on the campus, they kept everybody's spirits up.

Sandi Cupples

Did you like the changes that came about when the men came back from service?

Mary Etta McManus

Yes, yes, I did, of course. I liked to see the men come back, for one thing, but—and of course it was peace time and it was a newness, a change, and a challenge. Things were changing and it was a little more risky, a little more... but it was more exciting.

Sandi Cupples

Did you feel that it made things easier for you?

Mary Etta McManus

I don't know if you'd say easier. It seems that they were about the same. I was getting an upperclassman, I think, you know, it's hard to tell what the difference—it was an easier feeling, it didn't have an intense pressure of worrying about everybody and the war. And it was a feeling of optimism and hope, I think everybody felt better about it. We all worked, everybody worked hard and I think there were more parties, I think there was more fun, after the men came back because they just were not worried about what people were going to say so much.

Sandi Cupples

Okay, what were the prices then for hamburgers, movies, gasoline, and your tuition?

Mary Etta McManus

Well, I knew about the tuition, I had a scholarship from my high school—the state gig, scholarships for certain high schoolers—and I think valedictorians, salutatorians could get those or if they didn't take them then somebody else in their high school could take them and they covered tuition and book rental and activity tickets and that was for \$35 a semester. That's what

it amounted to and that's what you, that's what that—but it was a lot, because room and board cost maybe \$5 a week and I can't remember about hamburgers but I think they were like fifteen cents, maybe a quarter, but I don't remember. Girls usually had to get a date if they went out to get a hamburger. I worked at the co-op, where the co-op, well, where the Alamo II is now. I worked there in the restaurant, and so got my meals and didn't notice how much things cost because I didn't have any money to buy anything with anyway, so if I went out for a hamburger or a coke or something I would of had a date. I think cokes were a nickel and I imagine they were—there was a little drugstore, [Cohen's?] Drug Store, there's a drug store downtown now, just a couple of doors down from the theater, around the corner, that's where Cohen's was. They had a little room where there were tables and a jukebox and we could dance in there and that's where a lot of people hung out if we weren't at the co-op or—and the co-op was only open for meals, they weren't open all the time. And, let's see, gasoline, I suppose it was like thirty-five cents a gallon or something like that, but we traveled by bus, most of the time. The bus system was good here, you could get to Bloomington—if you got home before ten or eleven. If you didn't, you walked home from Bloomington, but we didn't go very often. And—but the tuition—the book, we didn't buy any books, we rented all our books from a bookshop and that scholarship was worth a lot because it covered so many things, you know.

Sandi Cupples

So, you mentioned that when you went out to eat, you went with a date, but did you have dorm, a cafeteria for your dorm?

Mary Etta McManus

There was only one dorm, and it was Fell Hall. Most of the people lived in rooming houses, right next to Alamo II. Beginning there and all the way down to town, there were mostly pretty large older houses and they rented rooms out. On both sides of the street, up and down, blocks around the school, that's what there were. And a few of those had cooking—places where girls could cook—or boy—men too. Men's houses, I think they had [inaudible] some places. No, there weren't dormitories, you went to a restaurant or you cooked your own. Fell Hall cafeteria, I think at, part of the time, they did, you could go in there and buy your meals, if you, even though you didn't live there. A few houses, Mrs. Barnes's over on University, she served meals. I lived there when I was a senior and that was a fun place to live. But most people had jobs for their meals or worked somehow. I worked also in the radio station that was on campus, we only had a few hours a day at that time, but that job I enjoyed the very most. Helen Marshall was the sponsor of it, and the people—they were—the programs were connected to different departments. They would put on informational programs about their department, but it was, I really did enjoy it. In the meantime, my son went here to school and he worked at WGLT. He was mostly a jazz announcer. So it was very different, you know, and they were on so many more hours. But it was a job I enjoyed so much.

Sandi Cupples

Good, okay. What was the typical mode of dress for in class or church or dates [inaudible]?

Mary Etta McManus

Well, we wore pleated skirts and sweaters and sometimes, like, you would have there a v-neck vest sweater and a shirt like that, but mostly it was skirts and sweaters, very few pants unless we were going to a cold ball game or something like that. And those were okay for church too, you know, they were, you put on hose and high heels and you didn't go to church or a tea, they did have a lot of receptions and teas... I remember, oh let's see, he was governor of Illinois and then ran for president, Adlai Stevenson, was—had a reception here in Fell Hall when he was governor and of course, we did wear bobby socks and saddle shoes and we had a sort of

motley of clothes, but there was a definite, you didn't just wear any old thing to class or to teas or things like that.

Sandi Cupples

What was the most important national event that happened those years? I know you mentioned the war, but what besides that?

Mary Etta McManus

Well, I think the, it was the days when we won a victory, Victory in Europe, Victory in Japan. The V-12 was here the first year I was here, and that was a—the Navy officers unit, my brother was in that unit, he was here for a few months. It was also a fly—a Naval flying unit down at Wesleyan, so there were those boys around but they had hours. The girls walked them home in those days. But the Navy V-12 would raise the flag every morning, you know, on campus, and the platoon would come out. So we were, that was, people would come out just to be there for the flag raising. I think that those were the—I guess that overshadowed everything else, the war, and looking for victory. Memorial Day was—not—well, not Memorial Day, but Veteran's Day, was a very big day, and at that time, in November, you know, November 11th, was a very big day. We went to school on Saturdays for a while, to conserve—I guess, it was so that we could get out—so that we could get out earlier in spring and people could go and work on farms, because of course farm supply was—workers were in—were needed then more than they do now.

Sandi Cupples

What were the popular forms of entertainment on campus?

Mary Etta McManus

Well, dancing, dances, a lot different from what they are now, but we used to have sock hops and that's when we could wear our bobby socks and skirts and sweaters, you know, and jitter bug and then they had formals, those were—everyone wanted to go to the Sweetheart Cotillion, something like that, in the spring, I think that was Fell Hall put that on. Then we would dress up in formals and have a—not—really nice swing band, you know. The Big Four bands came, they were, like, Tommy Dorsey—Dorsey, there were four of those bands that came each year and we broke our necks to get to go to those. I think for just a little bit extra, with our activity ticket we could get tickets to all of those and everybody tried to go and was getting a date for those way ahead of time.

Sandi Cupples

What do you remember about the towns of Bloomington and Normal?

Mary Etta McManus

Well, of course, they were so much smaller. They were—the people were very friendly. I think so many people had students in their homes and there was a much closer tie, I think, with the total student body. There was an ease with the professors and the students, a common bond, we weren't in their homes very much but were very—there was a—I don't know, they treated us on a level that was very nice but not totally on the same level. The town of Normal was not quite so involved with the university, I don't think, as they are now because there wasn't that much money to be spent. They—it was like the university was more—was a little more their baby than it is now. The university's grown so large that Normal has diminished in, you know, in relative size. But it was a friendly town. The univer—the campus was just within a few blocks, you know, it was so, confined, you know, that you just didn't spill over like it does now.

Sandi Cupples

Did the campus at that time then just exist—was the quadrangular—

Mary Etta McManus

Pretty much so. College—what's College Avenue now was the north side and Beaufort was the south, you know, Main, no, University Street was the west and School Street the east, so you see it was really much, much smaller.

Sandi Cupples

—much smaller compared than now. What about the use of tobacco and alcoholic beverages?

Mary Etta McManus

Well, you weren't—we weren't supposed to smoke on campus at that time, you couldn't smoke in any state-owned university, any—or any state-owned building, anywhere, because the insurance laws wouldn't cover it if there were any—if smoking was going on there. And then nobody was supposed to drink any alcohol. I think there were a few people did, but not very many. They really didn't.

Sandi Cupples

At that time it was ISNU, wasn't it?

Mary Etta McManus

Mmh-hmm. Mmh-hmm.

Sandi Cupples

What did you like most about it?

Mary Etta McManus

Well, this closeness and the academic level, I think the professors were able to hold up a high academic level, and their emphasis on learning, you really, there was a—really a joy of learning. "Gladly would he learn and gladly teach" was really a strong—it was a very strong feeling here. The teachers and the students, it permeated the whole thing and I liked that. But it was the kind of one-levelness of it. You didn't really have a big variety of people and, you know, we didn't know people from other lands, we didn't—we were pretty much central Illinois people, which was fine people, but we didn't have a lot of new things to exchange, a lot of new experiences.

Sandi Cupples

So what about—did you like the least?

Mary Etta McManus

Well I think that I longed for more worldly contacts, or, you know, something that would expand my vision more. I didn't really long for it, I was—I felt like I was very, very busy and enjoyed it and occupied—I did—thinking back, I realize that I did enjoy those years very, very much.

Sandi Cupples

I'm sure we all will once we leave here.

Mary Etta McManus

—look back on it, right.

Sandi Cupples

Mmh-hmm. In summary, are there any other special that—which—that we haven't covered, that you'd like to add?

Mary Etta McManus

Well, a couple of things. One was the year, I think it was 1947, or 19, maybe, 46, in the fall, in football, we were playing Wesleyan—at that time we were very, very strong rivals of Wesleyan—it was a rainy, cloudy day. And the student body walked down the boulevard over here, you know where there's a boulevard street that ISU's on one end and Wesleyan's on the other, and the student body, behind the band, walked over there that day, you know, singing. And we won, by—in the mud, it was very muddy—and we won a touchdown. Nobody could see it, it was so muddy. But it was a glorious day. And then, one—we were all very impressed when one of our beautiful classmates, Edna May Seaton married a professor, a kind of a glamorous professor, who was a widower and came here, very interesting man, Bob [Brigham?] that was a kind of thing that, you know, was very exciting for everybody. Those are, you know, two things that were kind of interesting. Well, just an example, of the sort of thing we enjoyed.

Sandi Cupples

Good. Well, I've really enjoyed talking to you. Are you going to the game today?

Mary Etta McManus

I don't know whether I'll be going or not. But we've—living close by, we've been to almost every homecoming game.

Sandi Cupples

Oh, I see.

Mary Etta McManus

It's been nice to live close by. We've really have kept in close contact and seen the university grow.

Sandi Cupples

Good. Thank you very much.

Mary Etta McManus

Mmh-hmm. Thank you.